
Certified Translation

Getting It Right

Guidelines for Clients, Translators and Translation Companies



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This document has been created in collaboration with practising translators and language service companies. A special note of thanks to Carina Balbo from My Language Hub who has been instrumental in collecting and consolidating best practices, and creating this guidance.

This document outlines best practices and guidelines on certifying translations in the United Kingdom. It is intended for use with individuals and organisations who require certified translations, as well as translators and translation companies producing certified translations.

The below guidance is endorsed by the UK's leading language industry associations, the Association of Translation Companies (ATC), the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI) and the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL).

If you need a certified translation of a document that is not in English, it is important to choose a qualified, registered translator or translation company. This expectation is clearly set out in <https://www.gov.uk/certifying-a-document>.

You can reduce the risk of error, omission or rejection of the translation by only using a translator or translation company with a clear affiliation to a recognised professional body or association such as the Association of Translation Companies (ATC), the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI) and the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL).

ATC, ITI and CIOL maintain easily accessed public registers of accredited companies and translators:

- <https://atc.org.uk/member-directory/>
- https://www.iti.org.uk/iti-directory.html?directory_type=translator
- <https://www.ciol.org.uk/translator>

As per government guidance, the translation is best accompanied by a certificate with at least the following information:

- The translation is “a true and accurate translation of the original document”
- The date of the translation
- The name and contact details of the translator or a representative of the translation company

Businesses, public service and UK Government agencies can take confidence in the quality assurance processes of ATC member companies (Accredited), and in the accreditation processes for experienced professional translator members of the Chartered Institute of Linguists (MCIL and FCIL) and the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (MITI and FITI). All three organisations endorse each other's guidance for certifying a translation.

1. What is a certified translation?

A certified translation is one which fulfils the requirements in the country in question, enabling the certified translation to be used in formal procedures such as passport and visa applications as well as legal proceedings like marriages and divorces.

These translations are typically required for legal documents such as passports, birth certificates, and marriage certificates, accepted by government agencies and courts in the UK. Certified translations act as **official documents** which are deemed acceptable to authorities due to the presence of explicit signals that denote the professional competence of the translator. Therefore, when accompanied by the original document, a translated document acquires the same official and legal authority as the original. The translator or translation company accepts responsibility for its accuracy by adding a translation certificate or affidavit stating that the translation is “true to the original”, which is then signed and/or stamped by the translator or translation company.

Some may choose to include a caveat of “*to the best of my knowledge and belief*”, for example:

I, XXXXXXX, [working on behalf of XXXXX Ltd,] am a qualified translator having full membership of XXXXXX and a degree in XXXXX.

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the translated document in [target language] attached hereunto is a true and accurate translation of the original document in [source language] likewise attached. (I sign this translation in [TOWN/CITY] on [DATE]).

This is the type of certification that is required by UK government bodies such as the Home Office, Passport Office, and the UK Border Agency, as well as by universities and most foreign embassies in the UK.

The certification or affidavit should be written in the language of the intended recipient only. Therefore, if the translation is intended for courts or government authorities in the UK, the certification should be in English only, rather than in both the source and target language.

1.1 Certified, sworn, official or recognised translation?

There are a few terms that are used largely interchangeably in the language services industry: **certified, sworn, official and recognised translation.**

The definition of an official translation varies depending on the country’s legal system, as each country has its own requirements for stamping and regulating official translations. In the United Kingdom, certified translations are official translations that are stamped and/or signed by a professional translator or translation company accredited by the relevant professional body, such as the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL), the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI), or the Association of Translation Companies (ATC).

A **sworn translation** is a type of official translation that is recognised in certain countries and legal systems. A **sworn translator** is a professional translator who is authorised by a government or a court to translate and certify the accuracy of official documents, such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, and legal contracts. The translator adds a sworn statement or affidavit to the translation, attesting to its accuracy and completeness. The sworn statement is typically signed and stamped, and the translation becomes a legal document with the same value and authenticity as the original. Sworn translations are often required for official purposes, such as immigration or legal proceedings, in countries where this type of translation is recognised. The figure of the sworn translator does not exist in the UK, and therefore, no UK authority will request a sworn translation.

In essence, all sworn translations are certified translations, not all certified translations are sworn translations. The specific requirements and procedures for each type of translation may vary depending on the country, legal system, and the organisation or authority requesting the translation.

Finally, a **recognised** translation is a translation that is accepted and acknowledged as accurate and valid by a particular organisation, institution, or authority. The specific requirements for a recognised translation may vary depending on the organisation or authority requesting it, and it may involve certification by a professional translator or translation company. For example, a recognised translation may be required for academic transcripts and diplomas when applying to universities, or for legal documents when submitting them to courts or government agencies.

As no government-regulated certification system exists in the UK, individual authorities may require certified documents to be presented in a specific format. It is always advisable to obtain clear instructions regarding certification and the use of stamps or seals from the organisation requesting the translation.

1.2 Does a translation need to be notarised or legalised?

A **notarised translation** is a type of official translation that has been certified by a Notary Public or a similar legal authority. This may be required by the receiving authority.

In a notarised translation, the translator or the translation company representative signs the translation and takes an oath before a Notary Public acknowledging the accuracy and completeness of the translation. The Notary Public then affixes their official seal to the translation, certifying that the signature is genuine. Notarised translations are often required for legal documents, such as contracts, deeds, and powers of attorney, when they are to be used in foreign countries or for official purposes. The notarisation makes a document legally binding which means it can be submitted to government agencies, courts, and other authorities.

It is worth noting that neither a Notary Public nor a solicitor will be certifying the translation itself, as they are unable to attest that "it is true to the original". They only certify the translator's or the translation company representative's signature.

Legalisation is the process of verifying the authenticity of a document. This may include legal documents such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, and diplomas that need to be presented to foreign governments, educational institutions, or other authorities.

A **legalised** or **apostilled translation** is a type of official translation that has been certified by a legal authority, such as a government office or embassy, to be valid and legally binding in a foreign country.

In the UK, the authority legalising documents is the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The FCDO's legalisation process involves granting a certificate called the Hague Apostille, which is recognised in many countries across the world. The apostille certifies the authenticity of the document and confirms the authority of the person who signed it.

The FCDO can legalise documents originating in the UK, and translations of documents originating in the UK where the translation has been produced in the UK. If the source document originates outside of the UK, the FCDO will not be able to legalise the source document, but it can legalise the translation provided that the translation has been produced in the UK.

Foreign documents should be legalised in the country they originate in, or that country's embassy, if legalisation is required for the original documents.

Before a translation of a document is legalised by the FCDO, it must be certified by a Notary Public or a solicitor.

In order to legalise a translation in the UK, the translation needs to be

1. certified by a professional translator or translation company. If the latter, it is advisable to include the name of the professional translator in the certificate, as it may be required by the FCDO;
2. certified by a solicitor or Notary Public in the UK. When the solicitor or Notary Public signs the document, they must
 - sign the document in their own name (not a company signature, or a PP (per procuracionem) signature, i.e., signing on someone else's behalf);
 - have a valid practising certificate;
 - sign the document in the UK;
 - state a certification (e.g., "I hereby certify that ...");
 - state the action they have taken e.g. witnessed, certified a copy, confirmed as original;
 - (if applicable) include an original embossed/wet ink seal;
 - clearly print or stamp their name and the details of their firm, including company address; and
 - include the date of certification.
3. sent to the FCDO to be legalised and apostilled.

Find out more about the FCDO's legalisation process at <https://www.gov.uk/get-document-legalised>.

Note that when sending a translation for legalisation, you should only include the translation in the document bundle without a copy of the source document, as it is the translation that is legalised rather than the original document.

Why is a Notary Public or solicitor required to certify the translation before legalisation?

This is because Notary Publics and solicitors are legally authorised public official who can witness and certify the signing of legal documents, administer oaths, and perform other official acts. A Notary Public serves as an independent and impartial witness to the signing of the document, verifying the identity of the signer and ensuring that the signer understands the contents and implications of the document. The Notary Public then affixes their official seal to the document, certifying that it has been properly executed.

You can find links to notaries and solicitors in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on the FCDO website at <https://www.gov.uk/get-document-legalised>.

2. Who can certify a translation?

The leading language industry associations, ATC, CIOL and ITI, recognise and endorse each other's members' credentials, with the following types of members and member companies providing certified translation services:

1. Qualified professional translators who are members of recognised translation associations, such as the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL) or the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI):
 - a. CIOL professional members: Members (MCIL Translator), Fellows (FCIL Translator), as well as Chartered Linguists (Translator)
 - b. Qualified ITI Members (MITI translator or FITI translator)
2. Translation companies that are Accredited Members of the Association of Translation Companies (ATC), or Corporate Members of the ITI

CIOL and ITI members, as well as ATC-accredited translation companies, are recognised as meeting certain standards for professionalism, quality, and expertise in translation services. They are preferred by clients who require certified translations for official or legal purposes, as their translations are more likely to be accepted by government agencies, courts, and other authorities.

3. What is the format of a certified translation?

There are no strict rules for the formatting of certified translations in the UK, but there are some general guidelines that should be followed to ensure that the translation is accepted by the intended recipient.

It is important to ensure that the translation is formatted in a clear and readable manner, with appropriate line breaks, margins, and font sizes. The formatting should be consistent with the original document as much as possible but should also make it clear that it is a translation.

3.1 Heading

It is important to indicate that a document is a translation of the original by including a heading such as *"Translation of a..."* to ensure clarity and avoid confusion. This helps to prevent any misunderstandings that may arise if the recipient of the document is not aware that they are looking at a translation rather than an original document. For example, if the document being translated is a marriage certificate, the heading of the translation may read *"Translation of a Marriage Certificate"* in the target language. By clearly indicating that the document is a translation, the recipient can be sure that the content has been accurately translated from the original language. This is particularly important in legal or official contexts, where the accuracy and authenticity of the document are crucial. In addition, including a clear heading such as *"Translation of a..."* can also help to ensure that the translated document is properly filed and stored, and that it is easily distinguishable from the original document.

3.2 Tables

In certain countries, it is customary to translate text on a line-by-line basis, without any extraneous blank spaces, to ensure that the translated content is not inadvertently altered by any additional or superfluous text. In contrast, translation standards in the UK are comparatively more flexible, allowing for a greater degree of formatting leeway, including the replication of tables and font types to more closely resemble the original document.

3.3 Font type, size and colour

A certified translation may replicate the formatting of the original document, including font types, sizes and colours, in particular if the original document includes specific formatting that is relevant to its meaning or legal validity. However, in some cases, it may not be practical or feasible to replicate the exact font size or colour used in the original document. For example, if the original document uses a very small font size or an uncommon font colour, it may be difficult to reproduce the text in the translation. In such cases, the translator may choose a font size and colour that is as close as possible

to the original and ensure that the formatting is consistent throughout the translation. Ultimately, the goal of a certified translation is to accurately convey the content and meaning of the original document, so any formatting choices should be made with this goal in mind. It is also important to check with the intended recipient or authority beforehand to ensure that the formatting requirements are met and that the translation will be accepted.

3.4 Handwritten text

When translating a document that contains handwritten text, it is generally acceptable to use italics to indicate the handwritten portions of the text in the target language. To make it clear that the text is handwritten, the translated text may also include a notation such as [handwritten] enclosed in square brackets. It is not necessary to replicate the handwriting style or font in the translation, as long as the italics and notation clearly convey that the text is handwritten. In certain legal documents such as wills and contracts, handwritten text and personal notes may be present. It may not always be necessary to translate these annotations, such as circled text or arrows pointing at text. However, in situations where the text and additions may be relevant in court proceedings, it is advisable to translate everything, as they could be evidence of intention. A typical example is when changes have been made to a will after its execution, which must be witnessed by two witnesses to be effective. This may be evidence of the deceased's intentions, such as in a claim for provision from an estate.

3.5 Struck-through text

If the source document includes struck-through text that has been amended or replaced, the translation should indicate that the text has been amended or replaced. This is important to ensure that the translation accurately reflects the content of the original document. Depending on the specific situation and the requirements of the intended recipient, the translator may choose to indicate the amendment in different ways. For example, they may use brackets to indicate the original text that was struck-through and include the amended text in bold or italics or trying to replicate the font of the source text. Footnotes or comments may also be used to explain the amendment or provide additional context if necessary.

3.6 Paper size

Certain source documents may be presented on legal size paper, which is slightly larger than the standard A4 paper commonly used in the UK. This is often the case for documents such as contracts, powers of attorney, and house deeds. When translating such documents, it can be challenging to fit the text from the source document onto the A4 size paper used for the translation. In this situation, it is acceptable to make a notation at the end of the last line of the translation, such as "[cont. on p2]", to indicate that the text continues on page 2 of the translation. On the second page of the translation, the first line should start with the notation "[cont. from p1]" followed by the continuation of the

translated text. This will inform the recipient that a portion of the text from the source document has been translated on the subsequent page of the translation. Similarly, the translator may encounter situations where they have reached the end of page 1 of the source text but have yet to complete page 2 of the translation. In such circumstances, there are two possible options to consider:

- indicating that the following text appears on page 2 of the source document, for instance, by including the notation “[p. 2 of source]” and continuing the translation as usual; or
- drawing a diagonal line on the blank space to prevent any additional text from being added. However, it is important to note that in this scenario, the translated document may end up being longer than the original source document due to the use of additional pages.

3.7 Crests, emblems, seals, logos, signatures and photos

Translations should not include any reproductions of crests, emblems, seals, logos, signatures, or photos, as this could breach Crown, Government and other copyrights. To indicate the existence of such elements, translators should follow these guidelines:

- Insert the relevant description between square brackets, e.g., [logo].
- Draw a circle representing a stamp and write the text in the stamp in the target language.
- Draw a circle or square and write [photo] between square brackets.

3.8 Certificate

The translation certificate is an essential part of any certified translation and serves as proof that the translation is accurate and faithful to the original document.

As per government guidance at <https://www.gov.uk/certifying-a-document>, the translation is best accompanied by a certificate with at least the following information:

- The translation is “a true and accurate translation of the original document”
- The date of the translation
- The name and contact details of the translator or a representative of the translation company

It can contain the statement “I certify that this translation is true to the original” which confirms the translator’s responsibility for the accuracy of the translation. Some may also include “to the best of my knowledge and belief” which acknowledges that even the best translations can be contested. The certificate should also be dated and include the translator’s signature or, in the case of a translation company, the signature of the person responsible for the translation project, on the company’s letterhead.

It may be useful to include a table itemising the documents covered in the certificate, including the source and target languages and the name of the source and target document. This will make it clear which documents are included in the certificate and ensure that the translation can be easily identified and referenced.

3.9 Binding

There is no specified order of binding the source documents and the translation. However, these are some suggestions:

Option 1:

1. (Copy of) source-language document
2. Translation
3. Certificate

Option 2:

1. Certificate
2. (Copy of) source-language document
3. Translation

The latter option is more suitable if translations are notarised, in which the notarisation certificate is affixed in front of the translation certificate.

Translated documents should be securely bound to prevent tampering. Eyelets are preferred over staples and binding machines as they make it difficult to interfere with the document. Staples can be easily removed, making it possible to make unauthorised copies or alterations. It is important to note that all translated documents, including wills, submitted to the courts must be bound with an eyelet; failure to do so may result in rejection.

When translations are notarised, a Notary Public will bind the documents following the guidelines of their relevant professional associations.

4. Printed or digital copy?

Digital documents are increasingly being accepted in legal procedures. They can provide several advantages for translators and their clients. Firstly, digitally verified documents may provide an added level of security and authenticity, making it more difficult for someone to tamper with or alter

the translation. Using digital verification can also make the translation process more efficient, as clients can receive their certified translations faster and without the need for physical copies, not to mention that they are more environmentally friendly.

In the UK, the acceptance of certified translations in digital format may depend on the specific authority or institution to which the translation is being submitted. While increasingly more UK authorities and institutions may accept digital copies of certified translations, others may still require original hard copies bearing the translator's or the translation company representative's handwritten signature. To submit a certified translation in digital format, it is advisable to check with the relevant authority or institution beforehand to ensure that they will accept it. Courts require wills and powers of attorney, for example, to be physically signed, and the same applies to the translation of these documents.

While digital documents can be convenient and efficient for sharing and storing translations, they also present certain risks when it comes to signatures and stamps. In a digital format, signatures and stamps can be easily copied and pasted onto other documents, which can lead to fraudulent activities such as identity theft, financial fraud, and forgery. Additionally, digital stamps can be altered or deleted without leaving any obvious traces, which could compromise the authenticity and reliability of the translation.

To mitigate these risks, it is important to ensure that digital documents are properly secured and that appropriate measures are taken to protect the integrity of signatures and stamps. This may include using encryption or password protection to prevent unauthorised access, using digital signature software to create signatures, and keeping a record of all digital transactions to track any changes or modifications to the document.

As certified translations often contain personally identifiable information, care should be taken when sending or sharing digital certificates via email or other electronic means to avoid any potential data protection breaches, e.g. using a secure portal to share files, or using password protection or other electronic means.

4.1 Stamps

Digital stamps may be issued by UK professional translation associations, such as CIOL, ITI and ATC, to be used alongside physical stamps or seals. The digital stamp includes the association's logo, the translator's or translation company's name and membership number that can be verified by anyone who needs to verify the authenticity of the translation.

The digital stamp should preferably be in .png format, with a transparent background, so that it can be affixed to every page of the document in Word format, before saving it as a pdf document. This is one way of securing the document to prevent it from being tampered with.

4.2 Signatures

Digital signatures have increasingly become a standard business practice for people and companies to provide legal consent. There are many advantages of adopting digital signatures, in place of wet ink on paper. It facilitates ease of access to government for citizens as well as cutting down costs and time.

Should a digital signature be required, it is good practice to agree with the client precisely what kind of a digital signature is acceptable or required before starting work. Many clients will be satisfied with an electronic copy of a signature, or do not require specific types of digital signature, but it is always worth clarifying expectations upfront wherever possible.

The electronic Identification Authentication and trust Services (eIDAS) regulates electronic signatures and has three assurance levels of e-signatures to facilitate a common regulatory standard. These include:

- Simple Electronic Signatures (SES)
- Advanced Electronic Signatures (AES)
- Qualified Electronic Signatures (QES)

The core point of differentiation between the three formats of e-signatures relates to the level of security provided. SES is designed for low-risk scenarios, AES for moderate risk with high-volume demands, whereas QES is a robust signature format suited for large financial transactions that require a high level of security.

SES is the most basic level of e-signature that enables a user to electronically accept something. For example, SES accepts scanned signatures and webpage tick-boxes used for accepting terms and conditions.

More advanced digital signatures include AES and QES, both with different strengths and weaknesses. The Advanced Electronic Signature (AES) guarantees the authenticity and integrity of a signed document, and it is uniquely linked to the signatory. Even more advanced, a Qualified Electronic Signature (QES) is based on the same security protocols as an AES. However, a key difference between advanced and qualified signatures is that a QES requires a Qualified Signature Creation Device (QSCD) that generates signatures with a qualified certificate. In addition, unlike AES, a QES requires face-to-face or video verification of the signer as a pre-requisite before being granted QES signatory capability.

In the context of certified translations, the choice between AES and QES may depend on the level of data security required for the translated content. To facilitate this process, several software options are available on the market, including Adobe Sign which offers AES-only encryption, and DocuSign which provides both AES and QES encryption options.



Chartered Institute
of Linguists

www.ciol.org.uk



Association of
Translation Companies
DEFINING STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

www.atc.org.uk



Institute of
Translation
and Interpreting

www.itl.org.uk